

Pilton Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113515
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	325832
Inspection date	18 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Janet Simms

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1383
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roy Gardner
Headteacher	Mark Juby
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2006
School address	Chaddiford Lane Barnstaple EX31 1RB
Telephone number	01271 374381
Fax number	01271 349049

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the college and investigated the following:

- overall achievement, focusing particularly on boys' progress and achievement in mathematics
- whether work is consistently well matched to students' prior attainment and assessed helpfully to give them clear targets
- students' understanding of how to improve their work.

Inspectors gathered evidence on the day from discussions with staff, students and a governor. A range of college documentation was examined and first-hand evidence was gathered from observing students in lessons and elsewhere. Parents' views were gathered from questionnaires completed prior to the inspection. Other aspects of the college's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the college's own self-evaluation assessments are not justified, and these have been included in this report where appropriate.

Description of the school

This large school has designated language college status and is part of a teacher training consortium. It is in a loose federation with other schools on its campus and provides an extensive range of adult education facilities. Few students speak native languages other than English and most are from White British backgrounds. While average overall, the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is increasing significantly, and in the lower years is almost a third of the year groups. College provision includes a 'Bungalow' where vulnerable students and those with challenging behaviour receive intensive support. The many awards the college holds include International School, Healthy School and Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has many outstanding features, including the excellent care, guidance and support students receive, about which the college judges itself modestly. These excellent features of care lead to some exceptional aspects of students' personal development. Behaviour, for instance, is outstanding. The college's excellent work with an extensive range of partners results in high quality provision, such as that for vulnerable students. The large number of parents who responded to the questionnaire are overwhelmingly appreciative of the college's work. They give many positive affirmations of their children's enjoyment and good progress.

Students achieve well here, entering with below average attainment and leaving with increasingly high standards, particularly in English, science and modern foreign languages. Until 2008, when difficulties with the Year 11 examination led to very disappointing results, this was also the case in mathematics, but achievement in all three core subjects remained good to Year 9. Changes resulting from extensive analysis of mathematics have put students on track to do much better again this year. 2008 GCSE results were the best ever for the college despite the setback in mathematics. Predictions for 2009 are better still, with standards in the current Year 11 securely above average. Students therefore possess good basic skills to prepare them for their future education and working life.

The college recognises a gap between the achievement of boys and girls, and while this is narrowing, staff are taking determined action to reduce it further. Staff are fully committed to offering equality of opportunity for all, taking an increasing number of students into various year groups with a highly complex mix of social, educational and learning difficulties. These include a large proportion of boys, who often require a different style of curriculum from that currently available, which is mainly based on GCSE subjects. The college has gone some way to providing this, through Youth Awards courses, for example, but recognises that more vocational courses are needed to enable these students to achieve better. The curriculum is otherwise good, offering a very wide variety of subjects in Years 10 and 11, including an extensive range of languages. Extra-curricular opportunities of all types are outstanding. Staff supporting the increasing proportion of pupils with LDD have identified that their progress needs to be tracked more effectively to ensure that they are achieving their potential.

Students quickly comply with the college's high expectations of behaviour and develop very positive attitudes towards learning. Year 7 groups seen in modern language classes, for instance, were concentrating very well and trying hard to emulate their teachers' pronunciation. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding is good, with a much wider appreciation of other cultures and backgrounds than usual because of the college's many contacts through its specialist status. Attendance is average, despite the college's best efforts to improve it, but the numbers of students persistently absent is falling. Students' excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles includes very good participation rates in the extensive range of sports and activities offered by the strong physical education department. Students contribute well to the college and to the wider community, for instance through the School Council and the Sports Council, of whose work they are particularly proud. Students feel safe and secure at the college, confident that the few incidents of bullying will be resolved quickly, and all safeguarding procedures are secure.

Good teaching lies at the heart of students' success, with examples of outstanding teaching accurately identified by senior staff. After the previous report, a successful focus on improving

the achievement of more able students has led to better learning and progress for this group. However, a key college target for further improvement in teaching is to provide a better match of work to meet the needs of all groups, particularly within mixed-ability classes. Able students do not have enough opportunities to learn independently because, as they say, 'We sometimes just do more of the same type of exercises.' Some students themselves identify that they learn best through opportunities to be active in lessons, focusing less on textbook work, for instance. The college is trying to provide more such 'experiential' lessons and senior staff use good monitoring systems to identify exemplar practice which can be shared. Staff have worked successfully to improve assessment, marking and feedback to students, which have developed significantly since the previous inspection. These procedures now provide clear targets and give students an accurate picture of where they are in each subject. Good oral and written guidance ensures they are confident about how they can improve and helpful target-setting days involving parents ensure that they know how to help their children's learning.

Strengths in management reported at the previous inspection, including outstanding direction by the principal, have been maintained and improved. Senior staff responsibilities and accountabilities are distributed well and staff show pride in and commitment to their areas of interest. The vision to drive the college towards excellence is widely shared. Stimulating debate between senior staff and governors shows all are keen to improve the college's performance, and the track record of improved standards shows that it has exceptional capacity to improve further. Increasingly challenging targets have been met or exceeded, including those connected with the specialist status. Students have, and feel that they have, a strong voice in what happens in the college. They enjoy good relationships with staff, appreciating the mutually valued 'principal's lunches', for instance, where students have an opportunity to interact with him on a personal level.

Good management and supportive, challenging governance provide a clear view of the strengths of the college and leaders have accurately identified what needs to be done to improve. Resources are deployed very effectively to provide a stimulating learning environment, at the centre of which lies the language specialism. This genuinely permeates the life of the college, creating enthusiasm and interest in languages and in far-flung cultures, amongst staff and students alike. With a huge range of overseas links, the college makes a very strong contribution to the international dimension of community cohesion. At the local level, the college is an important hub for adult provision and through contacts and visits with other specialist language colleges, the national level of cohesion is secure.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend opportunities for lower attaining students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly boys, to learn more actively in individual lessons and through a wider curriculum provision.
- Develop more individually tailored learning, especially to give abler students opportunities to learn more independently.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

31 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Pilton Community College, Barnstaple, EX31 1RB

Although on a very short visit we did not have the opportunity to meet many of you, I am writing to thank you for your welcome when we came for the inspection and to tell you what we found.

Yours is a good college which has many outstanding features. The quality of the care, guidance and support you receive, for instance, is excellent. Because of this, aspects of your personal development are also exceptional. We found your behaviour, for example, to be outstanding and the ways in which you contribute to the work of the college and the wider community. We agree with the overwhelming majority of your parents who say that you enjoy college and that your academic progress is good. GCSE results last year were the best ever for the college and Year 11 are on track to achieve even better. This is because teaching is good and because the college is well managed and led, which ensures that things are improving year on year. We were very impressed with the ways in which the language specialism of the college is evident in all departments and by your interest and enthusiasm for other countries, cultures and languages. We were pleased to see how you appreciate the opportunities to keep fit and healthy through sports.

We were focusing on just a few features of the college as it is not possible to explore everything in one day in such a large college. We looked at mathematics, for instance, and found that the reasons why students did less well than usual in 2008 exams have been fully analysed and things have been changed, so this should not occur again. We looked at why boys do less well than girls, and found that this is partly to do with the curriculum, so we have agreed with the college that they will provide more vocational courses to help some boys achieve better. We investigated whether assessment and target setting are now helpful and found that they are. You are clear about what you need to do to get to the next stages in your subjects. We looked at whether work in lessons is well matched to the needs of all students, an area where the college is also focusing. We agree with the college that not all lessons provide enough opportunities for independent work for quicker learners, or active opportunities for those who learn by 'doing' rather than listening or using a textbook. We have agreed with the college that staff will try to include these more in your lessons.

Thank you again.

Yours faithfully

Janet Simms

Lead inspector